

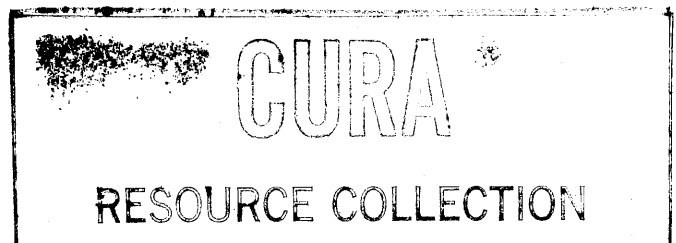
LEARNED HELPLESSNESS: SOME OBSERVATIONS OF WOMEN  
IN THE LABOR FORCE AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK

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INTRODUCTION

The Women's Movement has generated much speculation about the sources of female discontent. Freud's baffled question: "What in God's name do women want?" brings a range of responses, from a simple denial that women want anything but to be taken care of by a successful husband, to a candid acknowledgement that one half of the population wishes nothing more or less than full participation in the American ideology of equal opportunity.

An accumulating reservoir of feminist consciousness that has been building up over the past few years, has forced a re-examination of all of our social institutions. Curiously, one of the last to come into sharp scrutiny is the economic role of women, particularly the relationship of women to the labor force.

One notes in this connection, for example, that 1973 was the first time that the Report of the Council of Economic Advisers included a chapter on the economic problems of women. Indeed, the economics profession has been slow in developing expertise on the special problems of women in the labor force. Moreover, federal data sources have only just begun to tailor surveys so they can build appropriate statistics about women.

Despite this lag of official attention, there is wide agreement that the chief source of discontent presently stirring the Women's Movement is the perception of inequity in opportunities, rewards, and advancement in the world of work.

We owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Martha Griffiths, member of the Joint Economic Committee, who presided recently over a series of hearings on the economic problems of women<sup>1</sup>. These hearings served to focus attention on the problems and predicaments of working women. With a recent flood of books, studies, seminars and workshops, we are now beginning to strip away the mythological cloaks that have prevented us from seeing more clearly the relationships of women and work, and the inevitable relationship of women, work and welfare.

The total absorption of women into the maternal role as physiological and psychological destiny is one of the preferred mythologies of our time. John Kenneth Galbraith, the noted economist, amongst others, has revealed to us how a culture creates this cherished myth and maintains it for economic reasons. He uncovers for us<sup>2</sup> the interesting ways in which a culture, through shaping of social attitudes, creates the virtuous woman as the good housekeeper, the good homemaker, a good mother, a good helpmate, giving value only to her home and family as a basis of her real work. Galbraith refers to this as the conversion of women into a crypto-servant class, serving an economic accomplishment "of the first importance". Galbraith invents a phrase for this cultural imperative: "The convenient social virtue". This phrase captures his meaning that we ascribe merit to any pattern of behavior, however uncomfortable or unnatural for the individual involved, which serves the comfort or well being of the more powerful members of the community. Inconvenient behavior becomes deviant behavior and is subject to the righteous disapproval or sanction of the community.

He further goes on to say that this convenient social virtue is widely important for inducing people to perform unpleasant services. Virtuous behavior serves as a substitute for pecuniary compensations. He goes on to note that this convenient social virtue has of course, down through the centuries, helped to obtain the compassionate but poorly paid services of nurses, teachers, and I might add, social workers. (He points out, however, that such merit was never deemed a wholly satisfactory substitute for remuneration in the case of physicians.) The concept has its most fascinating implications, however, when we understand the full economic implications of women who work at home. We have, according to Galbraith, produced a whole class of workers, without pay, to manage the various tasks of consumption of a primary consumer unit, the family. This has been an enormous contribution to the modern economy and explains the anomaly that half of all Americans, women, have been expected to work at home, regardless of talent and training, for nothing but love.

Yet, as historians are now rather belatedly reminding us, the distinction between women who work at home and women who work outside of the home is a recent one. Women have always worked.<sup>3</sup> It is only with industrialization when work was separated from domicile, that women left home to work for the same reason as men who left the farms, for work elsewhere: to secure income. Our own social welfare historian, Edith Abbott has documented for us the way in which women were induced into the early factory system in order to preserve the male work force for agriculture, a more highly valued enterprise, at the time.

From time to time, the culture changes its signals, depending on the needs of the economic system. During World War II, Rosie the Riveter symbolized the valued virtue of women's capability of working everywhere, including shipyards and steel plants. When the need for their labor was over, women dutifully returned home to take up "the mother's mission", the mythic ideal of the '50's.

There have always been, however, a large number of women who have been exempted from the middle class myth that woman's place is in the home. Poor women have been outside the reach of the myth. They have worked because they have to. The simple fact is that the only cottage industry available for women at home is family day care and income from that source is only supplementary.

Women have always worked, then, and they have always worked for the same reasons that men have worked: to get income earned by working, and to raise the standard of living for their families.

Other factors are emerging, however, that are moving women into a labor force in unprecedented numbers. The perception rooted in an important technological change: the control of pregnancy is central to the great changes taking place for women and the world of work. First, control of pregnancy is not only possible but is increasingly viewed as desirable. A woman who produces a sizeable number of children is likely to be defined as socially irresponsible. Moreover, the average American

woman now has her last child when she is only 27. And since her life expectancy is 75, she may well feel that devoting some 50 years of her life to domestic service for one adult male has limited possibilities.

There are several features of the accelerated growth of women in the labor force and the changing pattern of that participation that should be noted as background for an examination of issues of discrimination.

#### LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN

Half of all the women in the United States of America between the ages of 18 and 64 are now working outside of the home. We have seen this steady rise since 1900 when the figure was 20%, moving to 30% in 1940 and 50% in 1970.<sup>4</sup> Two-thirds of the 35 million women in the labor force are single, divorced, widowed, separated, or have husbands whose earnings are less than \$7,000.00 a year.<sup>5</sup> There are considerably more minority women, proportionately, than white in this category of working women. These women, by necessity, have a strong attachment to the labor force. They work not for pin money but for bread. They work because they are heads of their households and they have children to support. They work because their husbands are disabled, chronically ill.

In this connection, we must record the grim note that female headed households with children living under poverty levels rose by 20% since the last census. The myth that if women marry they will be taken care of for the rest of their lives has finally eroded with the rising divorce and separation rates. Between 1960 and 1972, households dependent on women have increased 56%. This coupled with the fact that only 19% of divorced fathers are in full compliance with the court ordered child support system, three years after the court order<sup>6</sup>, draws the stark picture of women's economic vulnerability. Once again, minority women are disproportionately represented: three times as many Black women as white support themselves and their families without a husband present.<sup>7</sup>

A substantial portion of the women in the labor force are working because they want a better life for themselves and their family. They work chiefly as second income earners in the family unit. The fact that 14 million families moved out of poverty since the last census is attributed to the contribution of women's earnings as part of a two-earner family. Indeed, if the wife's income were to be excluded from the total family income, the number of families in poverty would rise by over 36%.<sup>8</sup> Families supported solely by a male earner now amount to only 35% of the total. Women workers have emerged as a decisive factor in lifting family income above the poverty line.

In short, women are the fastest growing sector of the labor force and they have a compelling contribution to make to the economic life of the country.

The patterns of participation rates yield some interesting insights. For some time, age, education and husband's income were the chief variables in predicting labor force participation.<sup>9</sup> But reflecting the economic pressures of an inflated economy and changing attitudes, these factors are no longer the reliable indicators they once were.

Presently 50% of the mothers of school-age children are in the labor market and one-third of the mothers of pre-school children have left home to work outside. The rate of labor force participation of young married women with children under six has doubled since the last census. The presence of young children is no longer a predictable deterrent. In round numbers, according to the 1970 census, we now have five million working mothers with pre-school children. The implications of this for day care provision has been stated and restated in other places.

What else do we know about the contemporary woman worker? She has, on the whole, completed her high school education and one in ten has a college degree. The more education she has the greater the likelihood that she will seek paid employment. Further, the discontinuity of her working patterns are changing very rapidly. The stereotype of the working woman as one who leaves her job in her late teens,

marries and has children and returns to the labor force at 35, does not hold up today. Women are more and more approaching an unbroken rhythm of work between leaving school and retirement. When they do return to the labor force, they tend to do so at all points in the family life cycle. The predictions are that we will have a continuing and expansive integration of women into the economy throughout their working lifetimes.

There is one significant exception to these participation observations. Women in poverty or on public assistance have lower participation rates than any other group. While studies reveal a high motivation to seek work, a lack of skills, opportunity and a sense of hopelessness in achieving a job at a decent wage level contribute to a profound discouragement.<sup>10</sup> We shall return to this observation.

In summary, with the particular exception noted above, women of all ages and stages of family life cycle have been surging into the labor force in massive numbers and with accelerating rates.

One is tempted by these figures to jump to a conclusion that women have taken a giant leap forward in their economic progress over the past few decades.

The facts are otherwise. The headlong rush of women into the labor force and the dissatisfaction, economically speaking, that they encounter brings us closer to the discontent fueling the Women's Movement, than perhaps any other source.

#### THE EARNINGS PROFILE OF WORKING WOMEN: THE GREAT INEQUITY "RIP-OFF"

Women who work at full time jobs the year round on the average earn only \$3.00 for every \$5.00 earned by similarly employed men. Why is a woman only worth 57% of a man, economically speaking? The answer to this question is complex. It deals with supply and demand in the economic structure of the country, with occupational patterns, and with a host of complex phenomena tied up with culture; the limitations of women's aspiration, the changing nature of the family, and a host of constraints which affect the educational and career planning of women; and finally overt and hidden discrimination on the part of employers who do not take woman's working role seriously.

For all these complex reasons the pay gap has persisted over time, and there is distressing evidence that it is widening. In 1955, woman's wages were 64% of that of men; in 1970 women's wages had dropped to 59.4%. The earnings profile in terms of median income for year round, full time employment reveals a humiliating story:

In 1970, for white men:	\$8,737.00
" " for Black men:	\$5,880.00
" " for white women:	\$5,078.00
" " for Black women:	\$4,009.00

In 1971 the median family income was \$10,285.00; however, for female headed families it was \$5,100.00, or 47% of the \$10,930.00 for male headed families<sup>11</sup>.

Earnings by educational level give a depressing picture. Women high school graduates earn less than men with less than 8 years of education. Women college graduates earn less than men high school dropouts. This data refers only to full-time, year round workers and does not include women on welfare or domestic and agricultural workers.

The most disadvantaged economically and the most neglected is the young Black woman. She works harder, longer and for less than any other group in the labor force.

Some further examples of the pay gap:

- A janitor, almost always male, will make more on his first day than a long distance operator, almost always female, of almost 20 years experience.
- Women now fill only 22.5% of the nation's 255,000 full time college and university faculty positions, and their pay averages \$2,500 less per year than the average amount paid to equivalent male faculty members.
- In the higher paid professions, only 2% of the nation's engineers are women; only 4% are architects; only 1 out of 20 of our lawyers and judges is a woman; fewer than 1 in 10 of our physicians is a woman.

In summary, according to the President's Council of Economic Advisers, for all categories of women workers, average earnings are now only three-fifths of men's earnings. Even if pay scales are adjusted for factors ranging from education to work experience, a pay gap of 20% remains.



Do these earnings gap figures indicate that women are receiving unequal pay for equal work? In some instances this is the case. There is now considerable documentation that there is a wide disparity between men and women in University faculty positions of similar rank and responsibility; in occupational classifications such as accounting clerks; in median salary levels of women and men scientists in the same fields; and amongst professional and technical workers in the business world.

However, the gross inequities in pay scales between men and women is chiefly due to the segregation of male and female labor markets, and this emerges as an issue of deep concern to feminists.

#### OCCUPATIONAL SEGREGATION: WHAT IS WOMEN'S WORK?

The major reality behind the inferior and worsening relative position of women in the labor market is the persistence of notions about which kinds of jobs are women's work and which kinds of jobs are men's work.

We are now just beginning to come to grips with the hard fact that our labor force reflects an extreme degree of occupational segregation. An accumulation of studies now documents not only the pay gap between men and women, but the confinement of women to the lower paying jobs. 70% of women work in female dominated occupations, characterized by lower occupational status and lower pay, than the 70% male dominated occupations.

Helping to perpetuate this segregation is the myth that women are simply supplementing their husbands larger income, or are in jobs to earn pin money. One sees this every day in the help wanted ads that stress "part time" and usually lower pay work for women. This, despite the fact that more than one in five United States' households today is headed by a woman.

Although women are represented in over 500 occupations, they are concentrated in low paying dead ended jobs: 75% of women are clerical workers; only 4% are craftsmen and foremen. Minority women workers are even more heavily concentrated than white women in the lower paid occupations, and even though they have made some

progress in occupational status since 1960, they still suffer more than any other group. As the following table demonstrates, while there has been some increase in the professional and technical workers, still clerical work, sales work, factory assembly and service work continue to dominate the occupational roles for women:

MAJOR OCCUPATION GROUPS OF EMPLOYED WOMEN, BY RACE, 1960 AND 1971				
DOL: Facts on Women Workers of Minority Races				
Selected Major Occupation Group	1971		1960	
	Minority	White	Minority	White
Number (in thousands)	3,658	26,217	2,821	19,376
Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Professional and technical workers	10.6	15.1	6.9	13.1
Nonfarm managers and officials	2.4	5.4	1.8	5.4
Clerical workers	22.0	35.6	9.3	32.9
Sales workers	2.7	7.8	1.5	8.5
Operatives (Factory-Assembly)	15.4	13.0	14.1	15.1
Private household workers	16.5	3.2	35.1	6.1
Service workers (except private household)	27.0	16.0	21.4	13.7
Other occupations	3.4	3.9	10.8	5.2

One substantial categorical decrease has been the decline in private household workers, chiefly among Black women. One notes this because occasionally a congressman usually from the South, will bemoan this decline and urge the tightening up of welfare eligibility. Perhaps he now needs to be reminded that the full time median wage for private household workers is \$2,101.00. Household workers are not protected by minimum wage laws except in a handful of states. They have very little other kinds of benefit legislation. At a time when the annual income necessary for even a low standard of living for an urban family of four is estimated at \$6,960.00, this decline makes it abundantly clear, on a basic economic fact, why women do not choose to work in other women's kitchens.

The quest for better salaries in work with higher status is clear from the 1970 census findings, and women appear to have made some gains in the professional and technical job categories. It is only when one glances at the male occupational labor force that one sees how much more rapidly men have risen in the occupational status ladders, for their increase in the professional and technical jobs has in fact doubled in ten years.

Glancing back for a moment in history, one notes that in 1890 the chief occupational past times for women were nursing, domestic work, sales and light factory work.

In 1970, with the addition of the categories of clerical workers, teachers and telephone operators, the occupational profile for women has not changed very much. A notable study by Valerie Oppenheimer<sup>12</sup> reveals that the sex distribution of jobs has persisted through time and, indeed, that the segregation of male and female workers into non-competing labor markets has most strikingly resulted in the lower salaries to women. The last census indicates, in fact, that only three percent of women received money incomes of more than \$10,000.00 compared with 25% of male income recipients.

To what can we attribute the persistence of "women's work" and "men's work", noting that there has been no improvement in the last 20 years for a differing occupational distribution by sex?

Complex factors appear to contribute to this phenomenon:

- the lack of opportunities for women to have access to job training or experience leading to more technical/managerial jobs with decent incomes
- geographic immobility
- overt discrimination against females in employment outside the home-making role
- the availability of a large pool of cheap, educated women
- the willingness of women to accept their "inescapable destiny" of being suitable only for the feminine sex-linked jobs.

In terms of supply and demand, this abundance of a desirable labor pool translates into lower wages and high unemployment rates for those in jobs characteristically designated as "female". These jobs supposedly require "manual dexterity, nurturing, patience for routine and monotonous tasks". If employers adapt themselves to such a labor supply, so that jobs acquire a "female" label, then the demand is not only for cheap labor but for cheap female labor; and consequently females are educated and counseled to pursue "female" careers. It is a circular situation.

Certainly there is much to despair in noting that the increasing dependence of the economy on the work of women has apparently not opened up an abundance of new kinds of jobs, and there is a long way to go before women--and particularly minority women--are proportionately represented in each job category.

And most women seem content, or reconciled perhaps, to do the kind of work that women have always done: school teaching, nursing, library work, social work, clerical work, and certain kinds of domestic and service jobs. Women are taught almost from birth that they have no capacity for or interest in scientific, mathematical, managerial or mechanical pursuits.

Nevertheless, there are breakthroughs by women into new occupations and they appear almost daily as dramatic instances in the press. You are all familiar with the story that begins "The first woman who. . . ." And so we note the first woman jockey, steamfitter and Marine General.

For those who considered the insistent struggle to insert "Ms." into the language as a semantic tempest in a teapot, the Women's Bureau in the Labor Department thinks otherwise. New names for 52 common occupations were issued in September, 1973. The Women's Bureau sees changing the name a step in the direction of changing the discriminatory game. For example, not these revisions:

- "boatment" and "canalmen" are now "boat operators"
- "chambermaids" are now "lodging quarter cleaners"
- "firemen " are now "firefighters"
- "policemen" are now "police officers"
- "maids" are now "private household cleaners"

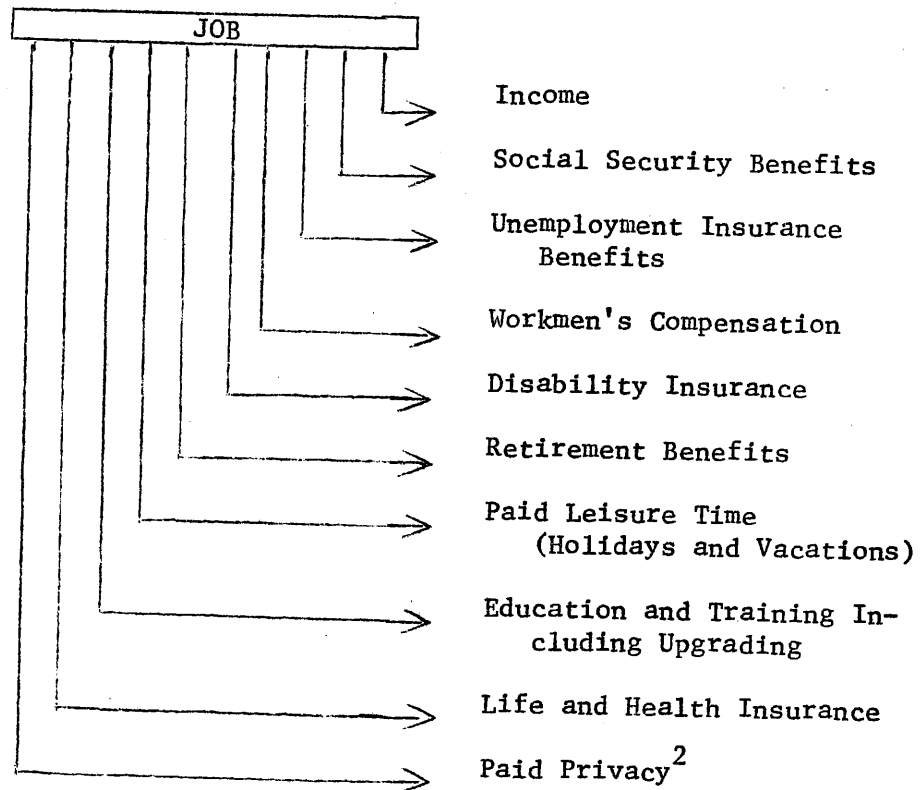
Perhaps now men and women will apply more freely with these sex-neutral designations. One welcomes every sign. These occasional breakthroughs, however, ought not to delude us into thinking the issue has been overcome.

#### THE DUAL LABOR MARKET: DISCRIMINATION AND "LEARNED HELPLESSNESS"

There is a theory<sup>13</sup> presently being put forward which throws a good deal of light on why women's earnings fall farther behind the incomes of their husbands,

brothers, and male colleagues. According to this theory, we operate in a dual labor market: white males are chiefly in the primary labor market, in jobs which possess these traits:

IMPORTANCE OF THE JOB  
Economic Benefits Accruing Through the Job<sup>1</sup>



Prepared by Dr. Daniel  
R. Kruger, SLIR,  
Michigan State  
University

<sup>1</sup> In general these are the benefits accruing to large numbers of employees.

<sup>2</sup> Not subjected to welfare rules and regulations.

Jobs in the secondary labor market present a contrary portrait: they are decidedly less attractive, involve lower wages, poor working conditions, considerable variability in employment, little opportunity to advance, and notably they have a fragile relationship to the benefit systems. And, of course, the principal constituents in this labor market are the poor, women and minority persons. Once trapped in the secondary labor market, it is exceedingly difficult to move into the primary one. The first job is decisive in establishing labor force participation.

Paul Samuelson, the noted professor of economics, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, presents some interesting observations on the nature of the dual labor

market<sup>14</sup>:

--white males (chiefly in the primary market) are the only group in our economy who continue to get higher earnings beyond the middle 20s

--Black men and all women in their attachment to the secondary labor force had essentially no gains in pay or status to look forward to with age

--in 1969 of all jobs in industry paying more than \$15,000 a year, 95% were held by males.

Since 1870 white males have moved from agriculture to blue collar work and on to white collar classifications, rapidly increasing their employment in government, non-profit organizations, technical and high corporate positions. Women and minorities have remained locked in the secondary market, reflected in the fact that of the workers not covered by the Fair Labor Standards Act, 45% are women; and further, 56% of all Black women workers are not covered by the Fair Labor Standards Act. Moreover, the last census data reveals that although 56% of women had been previously employed, only one-third of these were in employment covered by unemployment insurance. Pension studies are now being made in large numbers and they all disclose one central fact: Women are less than half as likely as men to receive pension benefits.

The dual labor market theory is related to the phenomenon of occupational segregation. Paul Samuelson makes an interesting contribution here, stating that the patterns of segregation do not represent a rational equilibrium based on intrinsic inferiorities as factors of production, but rather that it is a process of discrimination--conscious and unconscious. "Like discrimination against Blacks, Jews, homosexuals, immigrants and radicals, sex discrimination often has in it a self-fullfilling vicious circle: women become less self-assured, less possessed of crucial experience under the self-perpetuating regime. Those males and females who begin without sex prejudice become contaminated by it; and those who themselves think they do not have it feel they must in their self interest engage in discrimination 'to please' their customers or employees or boss or banker or...."15

Women, unfortunately, then, accommodate themselves to the kind of employment that a secondary labor market generates, so that over time they acquire a "learned helplessness", a factor now receiving a long overdue scrutiny.

The dual market interpretation throws important light on the nature and consequences of training programs. Do our training programs prepare people for the primary labor market or do they simply confine them to the secondary market, assigning them inescapably to high turnover rates, low wages and an absence of a benefit system? We are exploring this question now in a study underway in Minnesota to uncover the participation of women in MDTA programs, and preliminary information suggests that, indeed, such is the case. This is another alert to us on the ways in which public policy sometimes perpetuates inequities.

#### WOMEN, WORK AND WELFARE: THE PECULIAR UNEMPLOYMENT PROBLEMS OF WOMEN

The documentation of how women, welfare and poverty march jointly hand in hand has been stated and restated for social workers. A few facts are worth noting here, however, to underscore how this grim picture relates to women in the labor force.

There is a changing composition of the poor in the United States as shown in two income surveys released by the Census Bureau. While the number of low income families declined by 4%--chiefly with the addition of the woman as a supplementary earner--there was a startling rise of female-headed families identified as living in poverty. This group dominates the 25 million Americans living in poverty. In fact, every third female-headed family, regardless of race, is trapped in this poverty group. The stress of poverty falls more heavily on the Black woman, however. Three out of ten Black families are headed by a woman, and almost three out of five poor Black families are headed by a woman. One also notes this figure: there are four times as many Black households headed by women as there are white. In the Black community 70% of poor families are headed by a woman, and in the white community 43% of poor families are headed by a woman. Comparative median income figures are also startling:

--for all Black families:     \$6,864.00  
--for female headed Black families:     \$3,645.00  
--for all white families:     \$11,549.00  
--for female-headed white families:     \$4,025.00 <sup>16</sup>

These figures underscore why women with dependent children take the option of welfare dependency (\$7,000.00 annual income for an urban family of four is considered an austerity standard of living). While planned variation studies of various incentive plans yield confused information, common sense will tell us that women on welfare do not take jobs because cost associated with having a job and paying for child care often leaves them with less money, and fewer benefits such as vital health coverage for their families, than they would have if they were receiving welfare. Of particular concern to low income women are the high rates of unemployment, officially consistently higher by 24% for women as compared to men's unemployment rate.

In 1972, 2.2 million women could not find jobs; 1.2 million who wanted full time jobs could only find part time jobs; and the number of "discouraged workers" remains understated, but rough estimates indicate that almost 900,000 women simply dropped out of the labor market to form a core of "hidden unemployed", a phenomenon recently receiving wide attention. Even these figures seriously understate the unemployment problems of women.

Martha Griffiths, supported by a range of economists<sup>17</sup>, has asserted that the way in which the Bureau of Labor Statistics tabulates unemployment underestimates the problem. The Bureau defines "unemployed" persons as those who do not work during the survey week, but who have made specific effort to find a job within the past four weeks and were available for work. This does not touch on the vast number of "discouraged workers", nor does it take into account the many women who would like to work but have taken the option of welfare dependency because of a perception, entirely accurate, that jobs in the primary labor market that will yield a decent level of income, sufficient to sustain them and their children, are not available to them.



It has been stated that if the "hidden unemployed" were added to the official definition, the unemployment rate for the nation would, in fact, be 35%-not the 4.6% presently reported.

Tom Joe, a former assistant to the Under Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, has made an interesting contribution to understanding the linkages between the welfare system, the labor market and unemployment.<sup>18</sup> He points out that research and common sense have now brought us to the recognition that--by a trick of definition--we designate women who end up on welfare as "employable", rather than describing them as "unemployed". The latter connotes the absence of a job, while the former clearly implies the absence of a willingness to take a job. By this very trick of definition, then, we mask the true unemployment rates.

Further, both welfare mythology and welfare structure serve to foster the dual labor market practice. The welfare system isolates recipients from the opportunities and protections that are available to those on the other side--to those classified as "unemployed". That the welfare system is ill equipped for the tasks of undertaking job counseling and training for entry and re-entry into the mainstream of the economy has been documented by the host of WIN studies which now show that effort on the whole to have been notoriously ineffective. The training programs, typically, have little relevance to the interests or desires of the trainee and no relevance at all to the realities of the job market. Efforts in job development in public service employment have been almost equally disappoint, characterized by jobs in the secondary labor market, paying substantially less than minimum or even prevailing area wages.

This raises the interesting question of "How can the rights of welfare recipients be protected, so that they do not become an exploited, isolated reserve pool of cheap labor?" Tom Joe presents an interesting response. He suggests that welfare recipients, who have at one time or another been attached to the labor force, had they been in jobs that were protected by extended unemployment

coverage, would find themselves in a much better situation for re-entry into the labor market--and with proper training, to the primary labor market. He notes, for example, that while welfare recipients are forced to take whatever jobs are available, those who are "unemployed" can draw unemployment insurance which protects the unemployed worker's right to a "suitable job at a fair and suitable wage".

He suggests a basic reform of unemployment insurance to improve coverage, benefit levels and duration of coverage, removing the artificial and destructive distinction between "unemployed" and the "employable" on welfare. It is his contention that eliminating this dual distinction would bring over 1 million potential members into the mainstream of economic activity within the labor force.

Another approach to establishing and extending a benefit system for women is now receiving intensified attention: Providing Social Security coverage for women who work at home. It has been calculated that if our culture sanctioned the practice of paying women who work at home their fair economic value, by 1970 wage rates, this would amount to \$13,000.00 per annum.<sup>19</sup> (Perhaps we first would have to press for some changes in the Dictionary of Occupational Titles. While it recently changed some sexist job titles, it still attributes the same skill level to "foster mother" as it does to "restroom attendant". And both are a lower skill than that attributed to "newspaper delivery person" and "dog trainer".)

A bill has recently been introduced by Representatives Barbara Jordan, Democrat of Texas and Martha Griffiths, Democrat of Michigan to provide Social security coverage for women who work at home. The Jordan-Griffiths Bill would provide disability benefits, retirement benefits, in fact the same full benefits now held by self-employed workers. These benefits are especially crucial for the wives of working class men who have absolutely no security in time of family disaster or death. Under its provisions, husbands who become widowers would also be eligible for Social Security survivor's benefits to assist in paying for substitute home-maker services.

Both Tom Joe's recommendations for extending Unemployment Insurance coverage and the Jordan-Griffiths Bill for providing Social Security coverage for women who work at home signal the intensified interest in establishing economic security for women. It is here that the woman's revolution is underway.

#### AN AGENDA FOR ACTION

Aside from a few harems in the oil sheikdom's of the Middle East, there are probably few places where women can count on men to take care of them. Many women do not want to be dependent on men any longer, and poor women and working class women cannot rely on men for their economic security.

A vigorous program to improve the economic position of women is a necessity or the present worsening trends in women's unemployment, wages and welfare dependency will continue and accelerate as more women enter the labor market. These are some suggested agenda items for a plan of action.

1. Promoting a change in the nation's labor structure through eliminating the worst features of discrimination on the basis of race, sex, ethnic origin and age by legal remedy.

In the past 7 years, an impressive body of legislation has been achieved.<sup>20</sup>

Still missing, however, is an effective strategy for implementation and the will to enforce these laws. The Office of Federal Contracts Compliance has the power to take strong action but it is almost moribund in respect to both minorities and women.

Sufficient appropriations for staff compliance efforts is lacking.

2. Improving the data collection system on various aspects of the economic role of women. Gaps and distortions in information presently yield a highly imperfect base for planning. Specifically:
  - a. Labor market information exists only on a national level. For employment and career counselling, regional and local labor market information is necessary.
  - b. The underemployed and the hidden unemployed are undercounted and the current definition of unemployment also understates the situation with women.
  - c. Predictive information forecasting how many women will enter the labor market at differing periods of their lives is lacking.

- d. The Census Bureau never identifies a woman as head of household if her husband is present. Yet, if women were identified as the economic head of household, i.e. where husband and wife are both present but it is the wife's earnings that primarily support the family, two and one-half million families would be added to the category of families supported by women.<sup>21</sup> Vastly undercounted are those situations where the husband is disabled, chronically ill, or otherwise handicapped and the family is dependent on the wife's earnings.
  - e. The data gathered on occupations, that is, worker skills and the number in each occupational category, does not contain any delineation of either sex or race.
3. Attacking two issues of long range economic importance:
- a. The necessity for a plan for full employment. The spectacle of minority group members, women, and the young, now primarily excluded from the primary labor market, struggling for a place in the labor market sun, at a time of economic downturn, is ominous. The Employment Act of 1946 set out a national objective of "maximum employment, production, and purchasing power". The goal needs to be revived and implemented.
  - b. Improving the unemployment, disability and retirement benefit system for women who work outside of the home and initiating a benefit system for those who work at home.

Related issues of improving the arrangements for child care, restructuring work arrangements in pairing and sharing of jobs, expanding training and educational opportunities, are already drawing beginning attention and joining in these efforts is important.

Concentrating efforts on these issues which deal primarily with the legal, structural and labor market aspects of improving the economic status of women does not mean that we should overlook the psychosocial implications of the changing nature of women and the labor force and their impact on social work.

Practitioners in direct services in any environment that deals with women must grasp the organizing role that work plays in the lives of women and the implications of this for diagnosis and treatment. What is involved in the arduous task of juggling the roles of wife, mother, household manager and worker? Have you heard the rueful remark that every woman who works outside the home needs a "wife"? Are husbands assuming new sharing roles? Are the dependency relationships drastically

altered when the wife becomes a full-fledged contributor to the family support? What are the stresses for women, urged to take on roles and responsibilities for which they feel unprepared? What are the predicaments of the "marginal" woman caught between her own generational acculturation and the expectations of the "new" woman? Getting stepped on by both sides is often the fate of a "bridge" and it can crack up under undo stress.

While there is a beginning literature exploring these questions, both the curricula in Schools of Social Work, and agency policy and practices appear to be lagging behind the realities.

What does all of this suggest then?

Certainly an exploration of strategies to deal with these issues is in order. Task force inquiries, social action coalitions with women's groups and minority groups, and direct political action ought to become part of our repertoire of social action plans.

In this connection, need one at this point in history state that the Woman's Movement is not a fad nor an aberration involved chiefly with upper middle class women pursuing "self-actualization"? The record shows that, in fact, the chief benefits of the movement have gone to poor women. Millions of dollars in back pay have gone to women in factory and clerical work. Very little has gone to professional women. Carl Rowan, the noted Black journalist, a late and somewhat reluctant convert to the movement, acknowledged recently that the American minorities have more to gain than any other group from efforts in combating sexual discrimination. The grim truth is that the worst jobs in America, with the lowest pay, are what go to most Black women.

The Woman's Movement is changing the attitudes and identities of women. It is now a major social force with great and growing impact on social, political and economic institutions. As women change, so will men, and we can all say "amen!" to that as we pursue the makings of a compassionate human community that encourages respect and equity for all persons.

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18. Joe, Tom. "Rethinking Welfare Strategy", Congressional Record, March 5, 1973, pp. 1369-1373.
19. Galbraith, John Kenneth. "The Economics of the American Housewife", The Atlantic Monthly, Vol. 232, No. 2, August, 1973.
20. --The Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment  
--The 1963 Equal Pay Act, an amendment of the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act  
--Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, as amended by the 1972 Equal Employment Opportunity Act, specifically bans job discrimination in private employment on account of race, sex, religion or national origin.  
--Executive Order 11246, as amended in 1967, prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, race, color, religion or national origin in employment under federal contracts or subcontracts  
--Executive Order 11478, issued in 1969, prohibits discrimination because of sex, race, color, religion or national origin in federal employment  
--Order No. 4 of the secretary of labor, dated 1972, provides that contractors must establish affirmative action programs to recruit, hire, train and promote women  
--The Comprehensive employment and Training Act, dated 1973, provides that women may not be discriminated against in training projects funded by the U.S. Labor Department's vast Manpower Administration.  
(Excerpted from Sylvia Porter's Column, May 9, 1974, appearing in the Minneapolis Tribune.)
21. Letter to Challenge, May/June, 1974 from Carolyn Shaw-Bell, Professor of Economics, Wellesley College, p. 72.